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Language best part of Claudel's play

By JACK KAPICA
of The Gazette

It has been a long, hard three years since the Theatre du Nouveau Monde decided to stage Paul Claudel's massive trilogy of plays.

The trilogy — L'Otage, Le pain dur, and Le Père humilié — is at once an agony and ecstacy for theatre. Written in beautiful but seemingly endless speeches, each resembles an opera without music, where the stress is on the passion of dialectic, and not on development of character.

The TNM's three productions — L'Otage was staged in 1972, Le pain dur in 1973 and Le père humilié is currently in production — are all marked with a reverence for this kind of stately passion, brought out by director Jean-Louis Roux, who staged all three and performed in all.

In Le père humilié, Claudel's development of the family Coufontaine is brought to its logical climax. A fervent and obsessed Catholic, Claudel parallels the love of a young blind girl and a nephew of Pope Pius IX with the loss of materialistic power of the Pope in Italy.

The action takes place in 1870, just a couple of days before the Italian government separated itself from the Church; in the play, the blind girl and the Pope's nephew each discover that there must be certain sacrifices made in order to realize their love.

What is interesting about this play, and indeed the trilogy, is the language. Claudel writes in "versets" — free-form poetry regulated to an actor's breathing, which makes for a remarkably fluid and often beautiful script.

But if Claudel's forte is in language, it is not in the stage. The impassioned rhetoric would do a lot better on the page or on radio than in a theatre. And director Roux' reverential approach doesn't help much.

There are also a few things irksome about Claudel's Catholicism. So converted to the faith was he that he tended to mix up his unshakable faith with some Victorian concepts lurking around the early part of this century, when he wrote the trilogy.

In the handling of the young girl's blindness, for example, Claudel toys with two ghastly concepts. One holds that she is blind as a punishment for her mother's conversion from the Jewish faith — a kind of inheritance theory much admired by the Victorians. Another, even worse, sees her blindness as a symbol of all Jews, who have not seen the light.

LIGHT

Thankfully, Claudel's script doesn't dwell on these possibilities, except to give one of the girl's suitors a chance to hold forth at length about her "weakness."

Director Roux has also steered clear of these possible interpretations, and has given the girl an inner light which out-shines these nasty overtones.

Denyse Chartier, as the blind girl, delivers Roux' interpretation with considerable strength, although she wavers between overflowing love and overflowing grief. She is a pretty girl, and quite nice as the object of passion.

Like Chartier, the two nephews of the Pope (played by Giles Renaud and Marcel Girard) also have to struggle between these two extremes, because both are in love with the girl. Each does well enough, though Renaud is much more strong a personality than Girard.

What strikes one immediately as curious about the present production is its startling change in scenery. Where L'Otage and Le pain dur were staged in colossal, realistic settings, Le Père Humilié is flanked and backed by Hugo Wuetrich's jarringly modernistic series of eight chrome rectangles.

Props are also minimal — two three-foot-high pieces of Roman columns suggest the Palatine ruins, and a strange affair which looks like a bird bath suffices for the garden of a monastery.

The eerie music, conceived by Jean Laurendeau, works out well when separating scenes, but by some inconceivable incidence suddenly rips into a variation of Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star after one harrowing scene.

The production continues at the TNM until Nov. 2.

Monique Mercure and Septimiu Sever in Paul Claudel's Le pere humilie

Entre-Six ballet

Humorous moments are best

By JACOB SISKIND
of The Gazette

Lawrence Gradus' pocket ballet company Entre-Six is currently back at Theatre Centaur I, presenting the same program it offered last season, and the evening is a pleasant diversion.

Only one new ballet has been added to the familiar program — a work entitled Vladivostock — and it is unique in that it is the only offering of the evening not choreographed by Gradus.

The work of Andrea Smith, it is a duet for two male dancers that leans as heavily on mime for its materials as it does on traditional dance language.

On a first viewing, it seemed effective and made the most of the talents of the two performers.

The other items in the repertoire — Vivance, Esquisses, Variations de la Reine, Lyric Pas de Deux, Emergence and Toccata — are ever present reminders of Gradus' talent as a choreographer.

He seems to specialize in the miniature — little he does on this program lasts as much as ten minutes and most items are considerably shorter — and he also seems at his most persuasive in works of a humorous character.

The Centaur stage has no proscenium and the audience is seated above the performing area. This adds considerably to the problems a dancer has communicating with an audience, and it is perhaps for this reason that humorous moments seem to come through more effectively than others.

Other emotions seem strained and unnatural in this setting.

As a result Toccata and Queen's Variations were undoubtedly the hits of the evening and it was understandable that they were chosen to close the two halves of the program.

None of the dancers is identified individually, and so no comments on individual performances are invited. This is obviously a true ensemble, where egos take second place to the art of the dance.

It is refreshing to come across a company of this kind — and the obvious sincerity of all involved comes through despite the awkward setting provided by the theatre.

Performances continue until October 25. If you have not already seen this program, by all means make an effort to attend.

Sonny Rollins

'New' jazz catches fire

By NIGHTHAWK
for The Gazette

There is nothing like a "brand new" old pro, and if things keep up the way they started out last night at In Concert, Sonny Rollins is going to set the place on fire — subliminally.

His present quintet is excellent and features Nathan Page on guitar, Robert Kenyatta, conga and shekere; James Benjamin, bass and Eddie Moore, drums. They back up Rollins, the grand tenor man, splendidly.

The first set spanned old jazz, new jazz and then some. The programming of the tunes which, as usual, was improvised by Rollins on the spot was as varied and as unpredictable as ever.

His rendition of Tangerine, that ancient tune, was fresh and left room for an extended solo from guitarist Nathan Page. He is voluble and his phrasing is melodically interesting. Rhythmically too, he places his accents in unexpected places and sparks an old tune with new vigor.

The poetic Rollins emerged with Reverie — a slow, gorgeous ballad which he played tenderly throughout . . . a rare treat, since Rollins often likes to get his audience in a gentle mood and then hit them with a joke for the punchline. Could he be mellowing?

No. The next tune, The Cutting Edge is full of fire and drive. No poetry there — just long phrases full of spasms and joyous energy.

The last tune of the first set brought the house down. It was full of gaiety, brimming with zest and showed off everyone in the group. The West Indian flavor came through with a tremendous conga solo from Robert Kenyatta, supported in parts by the sidemen, who dropped out one at a time, until there was only Eddie Moore on cuica and bass drum and Kenyatta wailing ahead in demonic rhythms. That tune was called Please Don't Stop The Carnival. Pray don't.

Sonny Rollins is at In Concert until Sunday night.

Bombast by Wakeman

By JUAN RODRIGUEZ
for The Gazette

Multi-keyboardist Rick Wakeman offers his fans extravagence and bombast to convey the illusion of so-called "high class" rock music. He knows about classical music and he's not unaware of changes in contemporary jazz, and so he clutters his act with countless souped-up cliches and fragments of both genres.

However, judging from last night's audience at the Forum, Wakeman's schtick may be wearing thin. About 5,000 showed up — disappointing, considering that the cosmic British sound has been extraordinarily popular in this city.

Not that Wakeman did not give the people what they came to hear. There was the usual impressive staging — though not the 'Ice Capades' set he once tried out in London. This time, the backdrop was a painting of what appeared to be a giant, somewhat psychedelic calliope standing amidst the setting sun. Wakeman's arsenal of keyboards included acoustic and electric pianos, organ, synthesizers, and numerous electronic paraphernalia.

The star walked out in his patented long flaxen blonde hair and white sparkling cape and robes.

There was no candellabra.

Much of the time he played with his back to the audience. He swirled to each particular keyboard in a rush, as his music is a pastiche that takes some energy to put together on cue.

Wakeman was backed by a group called The British Rock Ensemble, who pumped out complementary cliches.

It...s tempting to describe Wakeman as the rock generation's version of Liberace, but the comparison is not fair. Liberace entertains with tongue in cheek, thus making his classical cut-ups fairly inoffensive. The more pretentious Wakeman offends because he offers little other than hot air.

Dalida sings

Singing enthusiasts may not have seen much of Dalida in the recent past, but we now have a full week of her inimitable style — Dalida is appearing currently until Oct. 19 at the Salle Wilfrid Pelletier of the Place des Arts, filling the hall with her brand of "honesty, sincerity and love."

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